Gates Plans to Step Down as CIA

By Walter Pincus
and George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writers

CIA Director Robert M. Gates, confirmed by the Senate a year ago after a long fight over his nomination, plans to leave the post in January after President-elect Clinton is sworn in.

"He believes that the new president would want his own team and his own selection as director of central intelligence," said one official familiar with Gates's decision.

"I couldn't see how he [Gates] could continue on, given the Iran-contra baggage he carries," said a source on Capitol Hill who is close to the intelligence community. "Even if he wanted to, Clinton could not have kept him on."

Questions about Gates's role in the Iran-contra affair, the Reagan administration's worst scandal, forced him to withdraw as President Ronald Reagan's nominee as CIA director in 1987 and led to an often bitter battle over his appointment last year by President Bush.

The Senate confirmed him on Nov. 5, 1991, by a vote of 64 to 31 after six months of controversy that focused on his earlier testimony about his role in the Iran-contra scandal and allegations that he slanted intelligence reports to suit the Reagan administration's hard-line views on the Soviet Union.

A longtime favorite of Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Chairman David L. Boren (D-Okla.), Gates instituted some reforms at the CIA during the past year in response to congressional demands for change in the post-Cold War era and, in the process, gained the respect of other lawmakers such as Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. McCurdy, sources said, urged Clinton recently to keep Gates as CIA director for a few months at least, to keep the job from appearing to be a political one.

CIA spokesman Peter Earnest said yesterday that "if the new administration asks him [Gates] to stay for a period of time to help

Clip

THE WASHINGTON POST . SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1992 A9

Director After Clinton Assumes Office

with the transition, he would be happy to cooperate."

Gates met with Clinton in Little Rock, Ark., on Sept. 4 for nearly three hours, providing a national security briefing traditional for presidential candidates. Boren and McCurdy also attended the session, and there were reports afterward that the Arkansas governor was impressed with the CIA director's expertise.

However, sources close to Clinton said at the time that Gates "will be leaving" if the Democratic candidate were elected. In Clinton's eyes, they said, Gates was a political appointee who carried not just the burden of the Iran-contra affair but also the growing weight of the scandal over the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro's (BNL) loans to Iraq prior to the Persian Gulf War.

A career officer who joined the CIA in 1968, Gates began as an intellignece analyst specializing on Soviet affairs, moved to the National Security Council in the Ford administration and stayed on after Jimmy Carter became president in 1977. Gates went back to the agency in 1979 and became an executive assistant to then-CIA Director Stansfield Turner and later national intelligence officer for the Soviet Union.

When William J. Casey became CIA director in 1981, Gates was promoted rapidly, first as an executive assistant to both Casey and then-Deputy Director Bobby Inman. In 1982, Gates was appointed deputy director in charge of the intelligence directorate and, in 1986, he moved up to the No. 2 post, deputy director for the agency. When Casey fell ill in December 1986, Gates became acting director. Reagan nominated him a few months later, following Casey's death, but he withdrew in the face of Senate opposition.

Reagan asked then-FBI Director William H. Webster to take over the CIA, and Webster asked Gates to resume his old job as deputy director. In 1989, Bush named Gates to be his deputy national security adviser, a post he held until he was nominated a second time in the spring of 1991.